

August 14, 2008

Dear Dan:

Some thoughts on moving forward. Yesterday I think we got off to a good start, though we got a little bogged down in some of the details. Anyway, I think the following might be helpful. It seems that a crucial period to cover or to deal with in some fashion is to go over again your particular expertise in the analysis of risk-taking, gambling and decision-making under uncertainty, focusing in especially on this crucial issue of ambiguity as it relates to the nuclear question.

In this regard, I think that there are two options at the moment: one we could just move forward today and get into the heart of the matter (i.e., to continue from where we left off yesterday), or before hand you could read Marc Trachtenberg, Chapter 1, "Strategic Thought in America, 1953-1966," which I think is the best piece ever written on the subject to my knowledge, excepting only perhaps Kaplan's fundamental *Wizards of Armageddon*.

The relevance of course, is for the reader to understand just how the "wizards of armageddon" thought about strategy and the way this intersected with nuclear policy and illuminates the particular risks of the nuclear era in ways that aren't sufficiently understood. Trachtenberg is very good on this I think and **we got into it yesterday in a way that made me understand some of the basic dilemmas in ways in which I'm not surely I ever grasped so clearly before.**

In any event, after telling this story of RAND, then we can move on to the related question of how you come to have knowledge of war-planning and to your rewriting of the BNSP and draft guidance for nuclear war-planning, along with some reflections on how this bears on the nuclear question and later policy currents. For most people do not understand the continuity here. I realize these latter comments are a bit vague but I think it would be good to talk soon about where to go in terms of the structure of the book, as I have various questions about how to do this in terms of different themes. Anyway, let me know what you think.

Best

Tom

Notes on Nuclear Book.

August 12, 2008

Dear Dan:

I've been going over some of your key nuclear files (and am presently searching for one entitled "It Can All Come Back" or something like that), so I thought I'd write some quick notes on your unique multi-causal analysis that makes your contribution so unique and far more likely than any other book to be equivalent to what Rachel Carson did for the environmental movement with her *Silent Spring*. Note: especially influential in this writing of mine was your

- a) 1986 McArthur Proposal: The Construction of Instability:
US First-Use Threats & the Risk of Nuclear War
- b) 1988 Research for a Political Memoir
- c) Nuc book/what needs telling?
- d) The Construction of Instability: Key "facts"/un-facts (lies)
for understanding post-war (pre-war?) World
- e) Misc

To recap from some of these, remember that what you've been proposing is "a wholly new understanding of the role of nuclear weapons in American foreign policy and a new, and ominous, basis for calculating the risks of nuclear war" based on "emerging data, hitherto highly secret and little known even within Executive branch... This secret history invalidates, or puts in question, much public and even expert discussion of US nuclear weapons programs, arms control policy, the US-Soviet arms competition and the risks of nuclear war, a great deal of which reflects the mistaken assumption that US nuclear weapons are designed and deployed only to deter or retaliate to

Soviet nuclear attack” (Ellsberg, 1986: 1) versus to back up US interventionary forces and US first use threats.

One key area that you uniquely know about from the inside and later studies are the interrelated questions of

- a) the world of officials, your “the moral and psychological universe of decision makers,” obedience to authority, Speer, etc. Here the question you raise so profoundly involves how could “American officials,” including those considered the most liberal, humane, etc., been involved in such preparations, planning, etc.
- b) this relates in turn to your focus on the secret willingness of men in power to risk catastrophe, even the probability thereof via reckless gambles, and the role of secrecy, deception and lies by officials” & to massacre innocents (strategic bombing, nuclear, Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, Central America)
- c) examples: a) strategic bombing b) hiroshima & Nagasaki c) **nuclear arms race** d) hydrogen bomb decision e) Vietnam, 64-65 decisions, all of which relate in turn to a) bombing propensity of US a) World War II, Germany & Japan b) Korea c) **Vietnam**.
- d) your specialization in decision-making under uncertainty, risk taking, gambles and most especially your work on a **theory of threats**.
- e) your knowledge of war plans (BNSP), command & control, delegation, nuclear crises
- f) your realization of the pattern of first-use threats (the first to really do so)

g) knowledge of types of deterrence, type I-II, including extended deterrence, working at cross-purposes; relation of first-use threats and desire to make those threats of first-use and possible first-strike credible; and knowledge of the linkages of first-use strategies, including outside Europe to strategic superiority, escalation dominance via first-strike preemption capability, and later through the construction of instability.

Here you have a powerful analysis of what really drove the arms race (giving it a narrow short term logic)

And role of two-sided Cold War decisionmaking versus non-offensive defense and cooperative security.

[A new thought here: one aspect of Benny Morris's piece in the NYT could have been just this; by indicating that the Israel's might want the Iranians to strike-back so as to allow them first-use of nuclear weapons, Morris may be attempting to make the world safe for an Israeli or US conventional attack against Iranian nuclear facilities; just as US leaders desired to make the world "safe" for US first use, by having such strategic superiority that US first use would not be responded to in turn by the Soviets.

Your knowledge of patterns in the arms race, Vietnam and other catastrophes radically revising the dominant understanding of these by disagreeing with the Quagmire myth; what you have is a huge amount of evidence of the willingness of ordinary men/officials to risk catastrophe consciously.

h) danger of nuclear use today, including by US, Israel and dangers of proliferation

i) story of RAND and work there

questions: what if Georgia today was part of NATO and the Russians had moved in? What if the US decides to preempt such Russian action in the future by forward deployment of nuclear weapons next to Russian borders?